

Status Report on Afghanistan



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Following are statements by Michael H. Armacost, Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and by Richard S. Williamson, Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., June 23, 1988.

MR. ARMACOST

I welcome this opportunity to discuss our Afghanistan policy with you this afternoon. I am particularly pleased to do so not only because we have been successful in moving toward attaining the principal objectives of that policy but because this hearing provides an occasion for me to express our appreciation for the strong, bipartisan support we have received from this committee and many others in the Congress in pursuing those objectives. Our policy toward Afghanistan provides evidence that Congress and the Administration can work effectively together to bring about historic results in the cause of freedom.

Our aims in Afghanistan have been consistent since the Soviets invaded that small, traditionally nonaligned nation in December 1979. They were, and remain:

- Rapid and complete withdrawal of Soviet troops;
- Restoration of Afghanistan's independent and nonaligned status;
- Return of the refugees in safety and honor; and

• Self-determination for the Afghan people.

These objectives have been widely shared by other nations, as demonstrated by the overwhelming majorities which have each year supported the Pakistan-sponsored UN General Assembly resolution calling for their implementation. Even more importantly, they represent the goals of the people of Afghanistan themselves. The valiant struggle of the Afghans, with the support of their friends, is what has made our policy achievements possible.

The Geneva Accords and Withdrawal of Soviet Forces

The successful conclusion of the Geneva accords on April 14 provides a framework for attaining our policy goals. Above all, it calls for the complete withdrawal of the Soviet occupying army. Moscow is obliged to remove half its troops by August 15 and the remainder by February 15, 1989, and, in fact, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze indicated to us that the Soviets expected the withdrawal would be completed by the end of 1988. This, in turn, will remove the principal impediment to achievement of other goals, particularly the safe return of refugees and the creation of a broadly based government representing the Afghan people.

The significance of this accomplishment cannot be overstated. The 1979 invasion marked the first time since

their occupation of Eastern Europe in the final months of World War II that the Soviets had seized territory by military force. A blatant violation of Afghanistan national sovereignty to salvage communist rule in Kabul, it brought Moscow's army and air force to the borders of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and to within striking distance of the Persian Gulf. It was an affront to Afghan self-determination and a challenge to the peace, stability, and security of the region. The reaction of the United States, and of the overwhelming majority within the community of nations, was strong opposition to the Soviet actions and support for the Afghan resistance.

The withdrawal of the Soviet forces—now well underway—is, perhaps, an even more historic milestone. Its implications go well beyond the restoration of the strategic balance of the region and the rebirth of an independent Afghanistan, important as these are. It strengthens the cause of self-determination everywhere. It could also lend impetus to efforts to resolve other regional conflicts.

You will recall that when we agreed in principle in December 1985 to Pakistan's request that we serve as a coguarantor with the U.S.S.R., we did so on condition that the accords be satisfactory to us. It was only when we were so satisfied that we took on the coguarantor role and, with the Soviet Union, undertook to respect the agreements arrived at by Pakistan and Afghanistan. We insisted, moreover,

that the obligations of the guarantors must be balanced and symmetrical. We were prepared to accept a joint U.S.-Soviet moratorium on further military supplies to Afghan parties during the period of their withdrawal and several months thereafter. The Soviets refused such an arrangement, insisting on their right to continue providing military supplies to their client government in Kabul. We consequently insisted that the United States would retain and exercise the right, consistent with its own obligations as a guarantor, to provide military assistance to parties in Afghanistan. Should the Soviet Union exercise restraint in providing military assistance, the United States similarly will exercise restraint.

The Soviets are withdrawing their troops as stipulated in the accords. We estimate that around 25,000 troops have left their garrisons. Over half of these have already crossed into the Soviet Union. The Soviets thus are proceeding on the basis of the schedule agreed to at Geneva. Soviet troops, thus far, have left most of eastern and southeastern Afghanistan, including the major cities of Jalalabad, Ghazni, and Gardez. These areas are now free of Soviet troops. In the coming weeks, we expect troops in the western portion of the country, including the cities of Qandahar, Shindand, and Herat, to be withdrawn. A withdrawal of Soviet forces in this area would bring them to the 50% mark. Preparations for the withdrawal continue throughout the country, however, and the Soviets could move other forces first if they wish to do so.

Thus far, the Soviet withdrawal has been fairly uneventful. The *mujahidin* have harassed some withdrawing Soviet columns but have not mounted major attacks. It is possible that *mujahidin* commanders in some areas have concluded local cease-fires with the departing Soviet troops—preferring to preserve their supplies for the battle against the forces of the regime.

In their efforts to bolster the Kabul regime, the Soviets are turning over large quantities of military supplies to the regime's armed forces. As the Geneva accords came into effect on May 15, General Gromov, the Soviet commander in Afghanistan, announced that Moscow would leave behind "facilities and equipment" valued at \$1 billion. In addition to consumable supplies such as ammunition, the Soviets are also delivering heavy equipment such as armored fighting vehicles and transport aircraft. Some of this is being brought in from the Soviet Union.

These Soviet efforts have not checked the continuing deterioration in the position of the Kabul regime. Some 20 garrisons and district towns have fallen to the resistance in the past few weeks. Much of the area vacated by the Soviets has been abandoned by or taken from the Najibullah army. The major city of Qandahar is under serious pressure from the *mujahidin*. Its fall would constitute a severe blow to a regime already wracked by factional infighting and desertions from its armed forces.

The resistance is well positioned to take advantage of the new situation created by the Soviet withdrawal. Its commanders have displayed an impressive ability to work together in tactical operations, despite differing party allegiances. It is very well supplied. The materiel it has received from its friends has been massively supplemented by equipment captured from surrendering or retreating Afghan forces. In seizing the eastern Afghanistan stronghold of Ali Khel, for example, the *mujahidin* acquired materiel that would provide them the means to fight the war throughout the country for more than a month.

The rapid deterioration of the regime's present situation and its poor future prospects have prompted Moscow to launch a volley of charges alleging that Pakistan is violating the Geneva accords by aiding the *mujahidin*. Pakistan denies that it is violating the accords and has granted staff of the UN Good Offices Mission for Afghanistan and Pakistan access to border areas. Islamabad has also reported shelling and strafing of Pakistan border towns by the forces of Najibullah.

As we told the Soviets at the Moscow summit when they raised the issue, we fully support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of our Pakistani ally. While we commended the Soviets at the summit for making the decision to withdraw, we also underscored that we and other countries expect to see them complete that withdrawal on schedule.

So far, we see no evidence that the Soviets do not intend to meet their troop withdrawal deadlines on August 15, 1988, and February 15, 1989. They have confirmed to us that there is no change in the timetable. We believe that in charging that Pakistan is violating the accords, Moscow evidently hopes to build up pressure on the Pakistanis to rein in the *mujahidin*. The charges could also serve the

Soviets by identifying a convenient scapegoat for the serious setbacks the Kabul regime has suffered. The Soviets may also hope to drive a wedge between us and the Pakistanis.

We have consistently maintained that the prerequisite for Afghan self-determination is Soviet withdrawal. The current regime in Kabul is only the most recent in the line of failed administrations installed by Soviet bayonets. It is illegitimate and lacks any semblance of popular support. Only the Soviet military presence enables it to survive. Its repeated efforts over the past 18 months to broaden its support through a variety of appeals for so-called national reconciliation and offers to the opposition of a share in power are bogus and have evoked no significant response.

Afghanistan's Future Course

We believe that Afghanistan's future political course must be left to the Afghan people themselves to decide. The United States has no blueprint for Afghanistan. Nor do we favor any group or individual. The experience of the British in the 19th century and the Soviets in this one suggests that the Afghans do not take kindly to efforts by outsiders to choose a government for them.

We hope that the Afghans will be able to develop a process for selecting a government representative of Afghan society. We support the efforts of UN Under Secretary General Diego Cordovez to promote a dialogue among the Afghan parties. His aim is to work out a transitional arrangement as a step toward self-determination. We do not know if his efforts will be successful.

We continue to urge the resistance to overcome its factional differences. We are heartened by evidence that the *mujahidin* are making efforts to increase cooperation both among commanders in the field and among the resistance parties. I have noted the better coordination of the resistance military effort within Afghanistan, particularly since the Soviet withdrawal began. The resistance alliance has recently announced both a cabinet for its proposed interim government and plans to hold elections within the next few months. These plans are tentative and may be modified over time, but they do show that the resistance recognizes the need for greater cooperation and is attempting to bring this about.

We do not know what kind of government the Afghans will choose. But I am confident that a free Afghan government will eventually emerge with

which the United States will enjoy the friendly relations which characterized U.S.-Afghan ties before the communist coup of 1978 and the Soviet occupation which followed.

U.S. Efforts

As part of our ongoing effort to keep in close touch with the resistance and the refugees, we have sent periodic special missions to supplement our regular staff in Islamabad and Peshawar. Our current plans include the assignment of a very well-qualified, language-trained officer to serve as Ambassador (to Pakistan Arnold) Raphael's special assistant for Afghan affairs. He will be spending much of his time in contact with resistance figures in Peshawar and elsewhere.

In line with our objective of promoting a peaceful and stable Afghanistan, the United States expects to play a role in helping the Afghan people get back on their feet and rebuild their war-devastated country. Refugee resettlement and rehabilitation will be a major challenge. Approximately 3 million Afghans fled to Pakistan in the years following the Soviet invasion; another 2 million are estimated to be living in Iran. In addition, several million have been displaced within Afghanistan itself. In fact, population distribution within the country has been dramatically altered, putting significant pressure on Afghanistan's fragile infrastructure and the slender food resources of many regions of the country. The widespread sowing of literally millions of landmines has added an ominous new dimension to the rehabilitation effort. The refusal, thus far, of the U.S.S.R. or the Najibullah regime to help locate and remove these mines is a moral outrage and inconsistent with their commitment in the Geneva accords to facilitate the return of the refugees.

We have been actively engaged with the United Nations and other governments in planning for the repatriation of the refugees and the resettlement of these people and of displaced persons within Afghanistan. Assistant Secretary Williamson has been coordinating our efforts in this area and will now describe them for you.

MR. WILLIAMSON

I welcome this opportunity to appear before this committee for the first time since Secretary Shultz asked me to assume the job of Coordinator for Afghan Affairs. I look forward to working

closely with this committee as we move forward with the implementation of the Afghan accords, which were signed in April in Geneva.

Under Secretary Armacost has given you a comprehensive overview of the political-military situation in Afghanistan. As he indicated, I will focus on our bilateral and multilateral effort to aid the refugees who fled from Afghanistan and the displaced persons within that country.

The Objective: Return of the Afghan Refugees

For years the safe and honorable return of the Afghan refugees has been a major objective of the United States and the international community. Their return, as well as that of the displaced persons, will enable them to participate in the political and economic reconstruction of their country. It will help carry forward the process by which the Afghan people exercise their right of self-determination and establish their own government.

As the Afghan people return home, they hope to begin rebuilding their lives after enduring almost 9 years of Soviet occupation and the destruction of much of their country. However, as Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, the newly appointed UN Coordinator for Humanitarian and Economic Assistance in Afghanistan, has pointed out, this expectation of better things to come can turn into a crisis of hope. As he notes: "Unless the essential needs of normal life can be quickly met, hope may be just as quickly followed by despair and renewed suffering."

The refugee and related issues pose a daunting challenge to the international community. The demands for expertise, experience, and finance compel an international response to which the United Nations and its technical and development agencies must provide leadership. This is one of the principal functions for which the United Nations was created—to help put into place the building blocks of peace and create the conditions "to give peace a chance."

The Afghan people are hardy and capable. Their valor and self-reliance are impressive. But despite their resilience, self-reliance, and downright toughness, the Afghan refugees need our help. The international community must rise to the occasion to assist the refugees as they return to homes in rubble, fields laced with mines, and destroyed irrigation systems—so vital in an arid country such as Afghanistan.

Organizing To Achieve the Objective

In recent months, we have put a great deal of energy and effort into assuring the creation of a UN relief and resettlement program for the Afghan people that runs efficiently, effectively, and without duplication. Beginning in March, I spoke with the Secretary General on several occasions, urging him to appoint a special coordinator who could organize and manage this type of UN effort and obtain the necessary contributions from the donor nations. Secretary Shultz raised the issue with UN officials when he signed the Afghan accords in Geneva on April 14. We continued to campaign for such an appointment right up to the announcement on May 11 that Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan had been selected as the special coordinator. We strongly applauded his selection.

We have already had extensive contact with Prince Sadruddin. I spoke with him immediately following his appointment and consulted with him in Geneva at the end of May following his visit to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. At that time, I shared with him our ideas on the UN assistance effort and ascertained how his thinking was evolving. On June 13, 3 days after the Secretary General announced the UN appeal, Prince Sadruddin came to Washington for meetings with President Reagan, Vice President Bush, and Secretary Shultz—an indication of the importance which we place on Prince Sadruddin's role and coordinated UN action. On June 14, I attended the first donors' meeting in New York, which was chaired by Prince Sadruddin.

Because Prince Sadruddin's office is in Geneva, we have appointed Ambassador Petrone, U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN offices in Geneva, to serve as his principal U.S. Government interlocutor with that office. As his work progresses, Prince Sadruddin is committed to provide frequent briefings to us and other donors on his planning and interaction with the various UN agencies.

Within the executive, we have also moved to organize ourselves so that we can administer the Afghan relief program in a coherent and effective manner. As always, major decisions will be taken by the President or Secretary Shultz or by Under Secretary Armacost as the Secretary's designee. I, of course, participate in the policymaking process. The additional role the Secretary recently asked me to undertake was to serve as coordinator of our Afghan policy, with particular emphasis

on the followup to the Geneva accords. I have established an interagency working group, which meets every day, to help me with this complex task. In addition, Under Secretary Armacost chairs a weekly meeting to review all aspects of our Afghan policy. For the indefinite future, we will continue these daily and weekly meetings, monitoring the situation closely in Afghanistan and continuing close coordination and consultations within our own government and with Prince Sadruddin.

The UN Assistance Program

Prince Sadruddin has moved with record speed in developing a coordinated UN program. Less than a month after his appointment, the Secretary General was able to issue his appeal to donors and supply them with an outline (to be refined later) for the cooperative work of the various UN agencies. Other meetings will be scheduled after donors have had time to study the relevant documentation.

I am submitting to the committee a copy of the report [UN document SG/CONF. 3/1] distributed at that meeting, which you may wish to include in the record. The report provides an overview of the proposed relief and resettlement program, with details about the structure and phased sequencing in the various sectors of food, agriculture, irrigation, health, and in logistical back-up. The report emphasizes that, as the refugees return home, the focus must be on immediate and basic support—e.g., providing food aid and agricultural supplies (seed and tools), repairing local irrigation canals, and delivering basic health care.

In its introduction, the report acknowledges that what is presented is "no more than the first outline of a picture"—a picture that will have to be refined in the coming months as more information becomes available and circumstances evolve. Even the estimated total cost for the first phase of the program (approximately \$1.1 billion) is subject to revision.

Nonetheless, the underlying philosophy upon which the program is predicated will not change. The Administration supports that approach. As developed in the report, the program is based on these key principles.

Humanitarianism. The report explicitly states that the relief effort must be seen as being a humanitarian effort and notes that the Secretary General has clearly distinguished it from his political good offices.

Decentralization. The report states that it would be unrealistic to

attempt a nationwide rehabilitation effort at the present time. Rather, program efforts will be focused at the regional level as conditions permit.

People to People. Aid will be channeled directly to the refugees as they return.

In summary, the report states that "the fundamental purpose of this programme is to link people back to their homes and engender self-reliance in order to avoid institutionalizing relief." We could not agree more.

There are basic principles that must underlie the UN effort to ensure the success of its program. The United States opposes UN financial assistance flowing through the Kabul regime. It must not be administered in a way that permits that illegitimate regime to enhance its political standing within the country. This position is firmly held by the United States. Secretary Shultz has emphasized this point on several occasions. I stressed the idea at the June 14 donors' meeting, insisting that "the UN assistance should be provided directly to the refugees and displaced persons as they return home, that the agencies involved must ensure that the aid indeed gets to the intended recipients and that humanitarian goals alone drive the effort." Other donors, such as Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Japan, also voiced on that occasion their opposition to the Kabul regime obtaining any control over UN financial assistance.

Prince Sadruddin and other senior UN officials have assured us that they understand the strength of this shared concern and that they hold a similar view. We have made clear—and will continue to do so—that we will be watching this matter very closely. Working with Prince Sadruddin, we are confident that the UN effort will be directed in ways supportive of the interests of the Afghan people.

U.S. Contributions

Let me now turn to our contribution and role in this relief effort. In fiscal year (FY) 1988, the United States budgeted \$119 million in humanitarian assistance to the Afghan refugees.

Approximately \$49 million of this assistance goes through multilateral channels—specifically, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Program—to assist the more than 3 million refugees in Pakistan. The remainder, consisting of food and agricultural equipment, medicine and medical supplies, and educational training and materials, is

provided bilaterally, primarily to people still within Afghanistan.

Not only does the bilateral program assist needy Afghans, it has encouraged them to remain in their country rather than fleeing to Pakistan and placing an additional burden on the Pakistani Government and people. Throughout the years of conflict in Afghanistan, Pakistan has earned the admiration of the world for its courageous stand against Soviet intimidation and the provision of refuge for millions of homeless Afghans. Our bilateral program, initiated with strong and bipartisan congressional input and support, has been generously funded.

Despite budgetary constraints, we intend to maintain an overall level of bilateral and multilateral aid around \$119 million in FY 1989. We are also seeking—within existing funding—additional resources, particularly food aid, to contribute to our Afghan assistance effort. We have recently identified for this fiscal year an additional 80,000 metric tons (MT) of wheat and 3 million MT of dried skim milk for the multilateral effort and 20,000 MT of wheat for our bilateral assistance—approximately \$23 million in food and transportation charges. Hence, our overall assistance for FY 1988 will total about \$142 million. Consistent with the agreement last fall with the Congress, however, we do not intend to seek a supplemental for Afghan assistance. Our continuing programs are consistent with, supportive of, and will be closely coordinated with the UN effort. As the refugees return home, an increasing proportion of our aid will follow them into Afghanistan.

We are encouraging other donors to contribute substantially to the Afghan assistance effort. In our appeals, we point out that we are by far the largest donor of humanitarian assistance to Afghans and that others should now assume a major share of the new burden as the refugees begin their return home.

We are making clear to the Soviet Union that it should make a major financial contribution to the special international assistance effort. It destroyed the country of Afghanistan; it is obligated to pay a major part of the bill to rebuild it. But its contribution to the United Nations must come without strings or any requirement that the funds be used to bolster the illegitimate Kabul regime. Soviet and UN officials understand our position clearly.

The U.S.S.R. should certainly assist in eliminating the danger to the refugees of the millions of mines Soviet and Kabul forces have sown across the

roads and fields throughout most of Afghanistan. No humanitarian task is more important than the removal or destruction of these mines. They are a major obstacle to permitting the safe return of the refugees and allowing them to begin cultivating their land. We and the United Nations are pushing the Soviets to stop laying mines, remove the mines they can, and provide information on minefield locations so that any remaining mines can be removed quickly.

I mentioned at the onset my profound belief that the United Nations must lead the international community in meeting the challenge of the Afghan refugees. I am convinced it will succeed and, in doing so, help advance interests of major importance to the United States. There are legitimate grounds for criticizing some of the failings of the United Nations. I have done so when I believed such criticism was warranted, as have many Members of Congress.

But, even as we seek to criticize constructively, we must not forget the indispensable work the United Nations does—work essential to global peace, stability, and development; work that benefits directly our national and international interests.

More specifically, the UN system is uniquely placed to lead the multinational effort to aid the Afghan refugees. It has the capacity to coordinate and pool resources. Contributions made in isolation by small nations with limited aid programs, for example, would be much less effective and productive than when channeled through the UN system. The specialized agencies also have had decades of experience managing the various issues associated with major refugee programs (e.g., distributing food aid and providing health care). Finally, the United Nations can undertake refugee programs in countries such as Iran where individual nations cannot. For all these reasons, the UN effort on behalf of the Afghan refugees is important and should be supported.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the international community faces a major challenge. We will not relax our vigilance until the last Soviet troops are gone, until all the refugees who want to return are able to do so, and until the proud Afghan people have established, through self-determination, a representative government that serves their needs and sustains their traditions.

Let me assure you that the Administration will work closely with other donors, the UN coordinator and UN agencies, and the Congress in this critically important endeavor. We will do our share to transform this challenge into an achievement. ■

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